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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7276
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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0976
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4529
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8067
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5628
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1444
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1392
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000181

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2018

TAGS: [PGOVOL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: SUPPORTING STRATEGIES FOR THE REFERENDUM

REF: A. RANGOON 153

[1](#)B. RANGOON 145

[1](#)C. RANGOON 134

[1](#)D. CARL-YODER-COPE 10/15/2007 E-MAIL

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Burma's pro-democracy opposition continues to struggle to organize a coordinated effort to respond to the upcoming constitutional referendum. We expect the regime will continue its severe restrictions on free speech and association, making it impossible for the opposition to carry out a widespread, public campaign. Activists inside Burma plan to carry out a "vote no" educational campaign via word-of-mouth, and using posters, stickers, and T-shirts. What would most help them succeed is funding for travel and equipment such as memory sticks, MP3 players, and cell phones. We are confident we could discreetly distribute these items. \$200,000 in additional funding to this Embassy would enable us to quickly assist the activists. End summary.

Reality Check

[1](#)1. (C) Burma's fractured pro-democracy opposition continues to grapple with how to address the regime's upcoming constitutional referendum (Refs B and C). The only group that has outlined a concrete plan to us (and this includes U.S.- funded exile groups on the Thai-Burma border) is 88 Generation Students. NLD spokesman Nyan Win told us today that the NLD still had not finalized a concrete plan for their "vote no" campaign. He anticipated they would have it ready by next week. Ethnic pro-democracy leaders inside Burma told us last week that they had no concrete plan to oppose the referendum either, even though most oppose the referendum.

[1](#)2. (C) In the lead-up to the referendum, we do not anticipate the regime will loosen the tighter restrictions imposed since the September protests. We expect a massive military and police presence as the date of the referendum

approaches to prevent any protests or civil unrest. Activists are likely to be closely watched during this time. Likewise, anyone attempting to approach polling stations to conduct an exit poll not sanctioned by the regime is certain to be arrested.

13. (C) Regardless of these restrictions, 88 Generation activists who are not in prison, and remain in Burma, are determined to go forward with their "vote no" campaign. The campaign will rely mostly on education via word-of-mouth. They plan on using sympathetic monks to educate their constituencies on why the constitution, in its present form, is not a step forward for democracy in Burma. Additionally, they will dispatch members of their organization throughout Burma to distribute educational materials by hand.

What They Need

14. (S/NF) 88 Generation has requested approximately \$4,300 for "vote no" posters, \$2,600 for stickers, and \$2,000 for its members to travel throughout Burma to coordinate with their members in other states and divisions. We can use the Embassy print shop and copiers to assist them in making flyers and pamphlets for their campaigns.

15. (S/NF) In addition, the opposition needs memory sticks and MP3 players, which they intend to load with educational material and distribute throughout the country. The players and memory sticks can be hidden and hand delivered from town to town by the activists during their travels.

16. (S/NF) Cell phones in Burma are prohibitively expensive, costing approximately \$2,300 each. Since many of their cell phones were confiscated after the September protests,

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activists urgently need cell phones to facilitate communication and coordination. Their traditional suppliers from Thailand have not been able to get them the equipment. Since cameras are very dangerous to carry, the opposition would like to procure cell phones with cameras so they can discreetly take pictures of their campaigns and document abuses by the regime during the referendum process.

17. (S/NF) Since September, internet communication has been monitored much more closely by the regime, and Special Branch Police confiscated many of the activists' computers. Post again recommends support for the wireless internet connection we proposed last October (Ref D), to assist the activists in communicating with pro-democracy groups inside and outside Burma to organize a coordinated response to the referendum.

18. (S/NF) We would also like to assist in distributing USB sticks Internews has developed, which allow the activists to utilize open source software to launch programs, and enables them to use web browsers without leaving a digital footprint. These would be invaluable tools for aiding their communication with each other.

19. (S/NF) Comment: The faster we can move this equipment and money to the activists the better. The regime plans on holding its referendum in May, and their "vote yes" campaign is already in full force. A large, sophisticated, public campaign will not happen in Burma: the regime shows every intent of halting any sign of public opposition. The Embassy has gained experience in distributing small amounts of funds without attracting additional regime scrutiny of the Embassy or our recipients. The activists need funds now to prepare for a vote that could take place as early as two months from now. We estimate that \$200,000 would enable us to assist the activists with their equipment needs. We will need considerably more assistance from Washington to facilitate communications by the activists with the outside world. End comment.

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